

THE MUSIC OF JOHN LEWIS

# THE JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA

WITH WYNTON MARSALIS FEATURING JON BATISTE



In 2013, I presented the music of John Lewis in a series of concerts with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra in the House of Swing. Because Mr. Lewis's work has been a huge influence on my aesthetic philosophy and multi-faceted approach to jazz, I wanted to construct a program that showcased his innovative piano style and highlighted his exceptional compositional skills. This was a daunting task.

John Lewis is undoubtedly a seminal figure in jazz history. To join this venerable federation of musicians, one must clearly be born with an innate musical talent. But that natural ability must be matched or surpassed with the militaristic discipline to develop the technical skills to play an instrument with a recognizable sound, the distinct rhythmic feeling required for deep swing, the ability to hear intention and communicate emotional intensity, and the intellectual curiosity to enrich your playing with an historical perspective. A select few have been able to climb this artistic Mount Everest and still possess the energy and wherewithal to become prolific composers and bandleaders. These musicians are a special breed.

John Lewis is a part of that extraction. His canon is an important chapter in the chronicles of pianist-composer-bandleaders that began with Jelly Roll Morton down in my hometown of New Orleans, and was most perfectly embodied by the great Duke Elling-

ton. Though Ellington was his greatest influence, Mr. Lewis's musical vision was singular, blending aspects of European classical music with the aesthetic values of the blues and a swinging beat. Blessed to be born in the era of jazz giants, he learned (in real time) the values of jazz from its chief practitioners, quickly becoming a young master and soon forging his own ingenious path for younger musicians on their own quests to scale this musical summit.

As music director of the Modern Jazz Quartet, his genius was clearly evidenced. During a time when most jazz groups were focused on the charisma of individual soloists, Mr. Lewis created a collective conception that incorporated the fundamentals of jazz in a most sophisticated manner. This uncommon approach, as well as their elegant dress and presentation, garnered quite a bit of opposition, but John Lewis responded with music. He was not a flamboyant, flashy player, choosing instead to display virtuosity

with the gravitas and clarity of his sound and the thematic consistency and cogency of his solos. The same can be said of his composing and arranging styles. He was all music, all the time.

One of the most well-read and erudite of all jazz musicians, John Lewis's worldview was just as richly informed as his musical conception. As only a true master can do, he often borrowed from other idioms and influences outside of jazz, illuminating their essence and originality while artfully enhancing his own creations. His use of counterpoint and the cameo appearances of classical rondos and fugues testify to this skill and insight.

In presenting this music with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis, I wanted to create a varied and comprehensive view of Mr. Lewis's artistry. Though much of the music chosen for these 2013 concerts displays his unique ability to assimilate a diversity of influences into his sound, I wanted the music to be accessible

to the novice and also insightful to the connoisseur. The compositions performed here include works for jazz orchestra, small group, and solo piano. They feature an array of grooves and various compositional techniques, yet, as was his way, they always return to jazz's Old Faithful: a swinging rhythm section playing the blues in 4/4.

The set includes "Django," an austere solo piano piece composed in tribute to the late French gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt, as well as compositions that feature smaller configurations and display Mr. Lewis's approach to the two most foundational forms in our idiom: "Delaunay's Dilemma," based on the chord changes of Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm," and "2 Degrees East, 3 Degrees West," a 12-bar blues. Wynton Marsalis and the more-than-capable members of the JLCO took the stage as an ensemble for the remainder of this set. Together, we were intent upon swinging with intelligence, accuracy, and soul.



Small group and big band playing pose different challenges for pianists. In small groups, we generally create all of the harmonies and melodies that accompany soloists. But in a big band, we must intimately understand the nuances of each arrangement in order to perform our standard rhythm section duties, accompany improvisations in relation to the written horn parts, interject improvised responses, play melodic material, and invent improvised solos. We have a lot to consider and a lot to balance. If done well, all involved, especially the listener, can follow the transference of themes and the alternating roles between leading and following that give jazz its democratic identity.

Having the opportunity to internalize Mr. Lewis's densely constructed arrangements was intellectually exhilarating and intrinsically rewarding. The study of his artistic philosophy and of the spirit of his era added a deeper dimension to my understanding of what

it means to be prepared. His personal experiences and beliefs permeate every composition represented on this recording. My own related experience as a pianist, bandleader, and composer provided a great deal of insight into Mr. Lewis's approach. There is much imagery in his music and so much personality. The depth of his belief makes his music timeless. For artists, what remains impactful and meaningful in one's art depends on the accuracy and intensity of your insights. Mr. Lewis's music is still with us, and it is an honor to place my artistry in the tradition of serving it.

So put on this record, listen with your eyes closed, and engage your imagination. Thank you.

**-JON BATISTE**



7. PIAZZA NAVONA (FROM THE COMEDY) 6:35

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed and arranged by JOHN LEWIS

Adapted by DAVID BERGER

**SOLOISTS:** WYNTON MARSALIS - trumpet

JON BATISTE - piano

8. PULCINELLA (FROM THE COMEDY) 4:07

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed and arranged by JOHN LEWIS

Adapted by DAVID BERGER

**SOLOIST:** JON BATISTE - piano

9. SPANISH STEPS (FROM THE COMEDY) 4:49

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed and arranged by JOHN LEWIS

Adapted by DAVID BERGER

**SOLOIST:** JON BATISTE - piano

10. WYNTON MARSALIS DISCUSSES JOHN LEWIS 1:40

11. TWO BASS HIT 6:45

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed by JOHN LEWIS

Arranged by JOHN BIRKS "DIZZY" GILLESPIE

and GIL FULLER

**SOLOISTS:** CARLOS HENRIQUEZ - bass

WYNTON MARSALIS - trumpet

JON BATISTE - piano

1. 2 DEGREES EAST, 3 DEGREES WEST 7:08

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed by JOHN LEWIS

**SOLOISTS:** VICTOR GOINES - clarinet

DOUG WAMBLE - guitar

JON BATISTE - piano

2. ANIMAL DANCE 3:55

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed and arranged by JOHN LEWIS

**SOLOIST:** JON BATISTE - piano

3. DJANGO 4:52

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed by JOHN LEWIS

**SOLOIST:** JON BATISTE - piano

4. JON BATISTE INTRODUCES THE BAND 1:03

5. DELAUNAY'S DILEMMA 5:23

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed and arranged by JOHN LEWIS

**SOLOISTS:** WYNTON MARSALIS - trumpet

TED NASH - alto saxophone

CHRIS CRENSHAW - trombone

6. LA CANTATRICE (FROM THE COMEDY) 5:08

M J Q Music Inc (BMI)

Composed and arranged by JOHN LEWIS

Adapted by DAVID BERGER

**SOLOIST:** JON BATISTE - piano

# THE MUSIC OF JOHN LEWIS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: WYNTON MARSALIS

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## REEDS

SHERMAN IRBY - alto saxophone

TED NASH - alto saxophone

VICTOR GOINES - tenor saxophone, clarinet

WALTER BLANDING - tenor saxophone

JOE TEMPERLEY - baritone saxophone\*

PAUL NEDZELA - baritone saxophone

## TRUMPETS

RYAN KISOR

KENNY RAMPTON

MARCUS PRINTUP\*

WYNTON MARSALIS

TIM HAGANS

## TROMBONES

VINCENT GARDNER

CHRIS CRENSHAW (conductor, tracks 6-9)

ELLIOT MASON

## RHYTHM SECTION

DAN NIMMER - piano\*

CARLOS HENRIQUEZ - bass

ALI JACKSON - drums

## FEATURING

JON BATISTE - piano

## SPECIAL GUESTS

HOWARD JOHNSON - tuba (tracks 6, 7, 8, 9)

DOUG WAMBLE - guitar (tracks 1, 2)

\*Did not perform at this concert.

\*Tim Hagans substituted for Marcus Printup at this concert.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO

SiriusXM

The Estate of John Lewis

Edgar Gankendorff

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